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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000695

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR D, INR/R/MR, I/RW, I/REC; PA
SA/INS(FOR JWALLER); SA/PD (FOR LJIRWIN, LSCENSNY,
WREINCKENS); SSA/PAB

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KPAO OPRC KMDR OIIP CE LTTE

SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY - LTTE SUSPENDS PEACE TALKS

¶1. On April 21, the LTTE announced it suspending peace talks scheduled for April 29 in Thailand. In a letter to the GSL, the LTTE listed its reasons for suspending talks as: its exclusion from the 4/14 Washington Conference, problems with the ceasefire accord implementation, and that GSL had not focused enough on rebuilding the economy of the North and East. From 4/21 to 4/23, English, Sinhala and Tamil media covered the story extensively and with a mostly optimistic slant. One English editorial focused on promoting rule of law and democracy, while another encouraged the government not to cave in to the LTTE. Editorials from Tamil and Sinhala papers encouraged the continuation of the peace process.

Television.

¶2. In their 4/21 and 4/22 newscasts Sri Lankan telecasters reacted to the LTTE suspension of peace talks with stories similar to independent MTV's (4/21): "LTTE pull out of peace talks temporarily because they were not invited to the Washington conference, living conditions of people in the North and East, and lack of normalcy in the North and East." 4/22 reactions continued to react to the LTTE pull-out. Independent MTV ran stories about "PM and President discussion regarding LTTE's suspension of peace talks, and "The sub committee meeting on emergency resettlement will take place as scheduled." State-owned SLRC ran stories about "PM fully concentrates on reasons for LTTE's temporary pull out of peace talks," and "PM and President discuss LTTE's pull out of peace talks."

Newspapers.

¶3. Most English and vernacular newspaper headlines on 4/22 focused on the LTTE pull-out from the talks, but many with an optimistic slant. On 4/22 Independent English daily, MIRROR's leader "LTTE pulls out of peace talks," was echoed by headlines in the English, Sinhala and Tamil dailies. The independent THINAKKURAL noted "Peace talks temporarily suspended." The sentiment of a temporary suspension also showed up in most other Tamil and Sinhala dailies' headlines. Government-owned Sinhala daily, DINAMINA noted, "LTTE withdraws temporarily out of peace talks - But it's not moving out of the peace process," while independent Sinhala daily LANKADEEPA also noted, "Stance to seek solution through negotiations, however remains."

4/23 headlines were similarly reassuring. Independent English daily, the MIRROR noted, "PM calm, monitors confident, " "President hopes peace talks will resume soon," and that "US expects talks to resume soon." Opposition daily, the ISLAND said "CBK dissatisfied at LTTE's unilateral decision" and "LTTE assures SLMM: Will abide by MoU." Government owned English DAILY NEWS noted, "LTTE pledges to honour ceasefire." From independent Sinhala daily LAKBIMA came, ""Bala says that they still would not walk out of the process of seeking a political solution."

4/23 headlines in the Tamil press were concerned with security and maintaining the peace. "Independent Tamil daily THINAKKURAL: "President orders to enforce the security of 1995," State owned Tamil daily THINAKARAN: "Tigers assure that they would continue cessation of hostilities," and also noted that "Tamil National Alliance fully endorses Tigers' decision." The independent Tamil daily VIRAKESARI said "Even though Tigers withdrew from peace talks temporarily, peace efforts will not be interrupted" - believes Minister G.L. Peiris" and also ran a sub-headline noting, ""Although we withdrew from talks, we have no idea of engaging in war" says V. Balakumaran, Senior LTTE Member." From Independent Tamil daily SUDAR OLI: "Big security nets in Colombo (Capital) after Tiger pullout" and "President unhappy about Tigers withdrawal."

Editorials.

14. Under the headline " Urgent tasks at hand," Government-owned English DAILY NEWS noted (4/23) "that firm enforcement of the Rule of Law is an essential precondition for peace." Excerpts:

"While the LTTE's decision to suspend peace talks with the Government "on certain critical issues" is likely to cause considerable worry among the peace-loving public, our wish is that every effort would be made by the main parties to resume the negotiatory process."

"We hope an earnest effort would be made by these parties to resolve their differences without further delay, for what is at stake is the country's future."

"Although it is encouraging to note that the LTTE has vowed to remain within the negotiatory process aimed at arriving at a political solution to the conflict, the chief parties may need to engage each other in an exchange of views as early as possible for the purpose of clarifying outstanding issues."

"However, there is no getting away from the need for creating a democratic ethos at all societal levels - grassroots or otherwise. This would necessitate the recognition and respecting of each others rights on the part of communities. The exercise of violent coercion by any party would be a violation of this important foundational principle for peace."

"The firm enforcement of the Rule of Law is an essential precondition for the establishment of societal stability."

15. Under the headline " The folly of equating terrorists to a government " Opposition daily the ISLAND commented (4/23) that "government should not cave in" to the LTTE.

Excerpts:

"We do concede that the Sri Lanka government has to take the rap for this infuriation. Despite common-sense and all experience in international negotiations indicating that it would be extremely counterproductive to deproscribe the LTTE, it being an international terrorist organisation, the Sri Lanka government yielded to LTTE blackmail of refusing to commence negotiations, unless their proscription was removed. Having thus proclaimed themselves as an 'equal party' to the democratic and sovereign government, the Tigers have since then proceeded on the premise that they are an independent nation not giving a damn to what the Sri Lanka government did or said. Nor did they give two hoots for the opinion of the so- called international community."

"They flouted the law of the land, the Memorandum of Understanding whose provisions they were bound to observe, violated international law and continued merrily with their patrons, the Norwegian Peace Monitors being blind to such violations and even tacitly sanctioning them while treating the terrorists and the government as equal parties. Child abduction, establishment of Kangaroo Courts, an illegal army, police force, police stations were all approved or ignored. Arms were smuggled in, ships sunk - even foreign ships - but the Sri Lankan government, the international community nor the Peace Monitors said nary a word."

"The fundamental flaw in this peace process is the presumption by the LTTE that it is on par with the state of Sri Lanka and have the right to act as a sovereign state. Be it the abduction of children for Baby Brigades, establishment of Kangaroo courts, smuggling of arms, sinking of ships, marching through security camps of the government forces, the LTTE has presumed and acted in a manner that they enjoy the same status as the Sri Lanka government. And for once when a foreign government, because of its own legal compulsions, does not invite them for a conference, they are 'furious'"

"Another major flaw in this peace process has been that the government-as we have pointed out in innumerable editorials-is conceding most of the major demands made by the LTTE. So far the peace process has mainly been one way. The only major demand refused by the government has been the rejection of the demand to move the armed forces out of the High Security Zones in the North because of very valid and compelling reasons."

The government should not cave in and President Kumaratunga should use her powers to help the Prime Minister not to be blackmailed.

16. Under the headline "Talks should continue," independent Tamil daily VIRAKESARI commented (4/23) "If the talks do not continue it will be a victory for those working against peace." Excerpts:

"The commitment and giving in policy of the Tigers to achieve peace, clearly helped them tearing away the terrorist labels on them. Tigers were able to show the international community that they are committed to peace and are looking forward to permanent peace through negotiated settlement."

"Ceasefire and peace talks created this environment. It is true that the chauvinist groups are planning hard to derail

the talks. It is very important that the peace lovers work vigilantly and with caution, without getting caught to these elements."

"This is the situation the talks have reached now. If the talks do not continue it will be a victory for those working against peace. "

"Failure of governments to keep its promises is a trend in this country. This has caused some doubt in the minds of tigers. Lot of trust building was experienced during the last one year, and the talks should continue and this country should create history for the whole world to admire. "

17. Under the headline "Increased need of dedication," Government owned Sinhala Daily DINAMINA commented (4/23) that the "Public should be keen to let both parties focus on peace" and "should not act emotionally." Excerpts:

"This type of set backs are normal....People in North as well as the South are thankful to LTTE for not opting to war...."

"The atmosphere is challenging both for communities in the North and South-as peace lovers all should request both parties to stick to PEACE..."

"All should be aware of opportunists... they should not be lured into war...these groups say that SLG was ever willing to give into all demands of LTTE. But The PM's letter to LTTE has showed that it's not the case....

"National and international preference is for peace... difficult for LTTE too to detour...both parties have their extremists..."

"Public should be keen to let both parties focus on peace...should not act emotionally...need to act maturely towards the welfare of Sri Lanka". WILLS